



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Guardsmen, Reservists and their family members encouraged to
nominate employers for the 2006 Secretary of Defense Employer
Support Freedom Awards at ESGR website**

ARLINGTON, Va. – The National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), in conjunction with the Secretary of Defense, announced that nominations will be accepted at the ESGR website beginning January 9th for the 2006 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Awards.

The nomination process opens on January 9, 2006 and will conclude on February 28, 2006. Over 1,500 nominations were submitted in 2005 on the ESGR website. In 2006 the goal is 5,000 nominations, a relatively small number, as ESGR estimates that over 125,000 employers in America employ National Guardsmen and Reservists.

To nominate their employers, National Guardsmen, Reservists, or their family members need only to visit the ESGR website at www.esgr.mil, and complete the 2006 Freedom Award nomination form online. ESGR Field Committees will review the nominations, and have the option to present three nominations per committee for review by the National Selection Board which will select up to 15 as 2006 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award recipients.

In 1996, the then Secretary of Defense William Perry instituted the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award under the auspices of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). The award publicly recognizes employers nominated by their employees, who voluntarily serve in the National Guard and Reserve, for exceptional support above the requirements of the USERRA Law. This prestigious award is the highest in a series of Department of Defense employer support awards that include the Patriot Award, the ESGR Above and Beyond Award and the Pro Patria Award.

"I am encouraging all National Guardsmen and Reservists worldwide, and their family members, to visit the ESGR website at www.esgr.mil to nominate their employers for this prestigious national award that recognizes supportive employers who provide exemplary support above the USERRA Law requirements for their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve," said Bob Hollingsworth, ESGR Executive Director.

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Previous recipients have included a “who’s who” of corporate America, including Home Depot, Wal-Mart, Sears, GE, Verizon, and UPS. State and local governments and a number of America’s small businesses, who are the majority of National Guard and Reserve employers, have also been recipients.

When asked about the impact of employee military service on small business, Hollingsworth said, “At no time in our recent history have the small businesses of America been asked to give so much in our nation’s defense.”

“Today, in support of the war on terrorism and the ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, an essential alliance has been formed as many of America’s employers have become inextricably linked to the nation’s defense by sharing their most precious asset, their employees”, added Hollingsworth.

In today’s environment of continuous mobilizations of National Guardsmen and Reservists, ESGR has recognized that more employers are being impacted by the loss of key employees. The Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award was expanded in 2004 from five recipients to now recognize up to 15 outstanding employers yearly.

The 2006 recipients will be honored in Washington, D.C. at the 11th annual Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award ceremony hosted by ESGR on September 19, 2006.

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is a Department of Defense agency established in 1972. The mission of ESGR is to gain and maintain active support from all public and private employers for the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve. ESGR volunteers provide free education, consultation, and if necessary mediation for employers of Guard and Reserve employees.

As the 1.2 million members of the National Guard and Reserve continue to perform an increasing number of unique missions that require extraordinary actions on the part of everyday citizens, ESGR will continue to be the informational agency for the employers of America’s new Minutemen. More information about ESGR Employer Outreach Programs and volunteer opportunities is available at www.esgr.mil, or by calling Tom Bullock at the National Committee Office at (800) 336-4590.

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